



Jon Waller/DN

Kwame Appiah will speak about the misconceptions of cultural differences at 4 p.m. today in the Nebraska Union. Appiah is a professor of Afro-American studies and philosophy at Harvard University.

Culture, conflict topics of talk

By Chad Lorenz
Staff Reporter

Forcing people to adopt a common culture does not solve the conflicts between them, a Harvard professor said.

"What divides them is not profound cultural differences," said Kwame Appiah, professor of Afro-American studies and philosophy at Harvard University in Cambridge, Mass.

What divides them, he said, are diverse values and political beliefs.

Appiah will discuss the misidentified problems and solutions of cultural differences today at 4 p.m. in the Nebraska Union in his speech, "Against National Culture."

Most people in the United States already share a common culture, Appiah said, unlike in Nigeria, India and China, where cultures are truly diverse.

Blacks and whites in the United States, for example, generally eat the same foods, speak the same language, watch the same TV programs and

agree football is a great game, he said.

Conflicts between men and women also arise, he said, but not because of cultural differences.

Conflicts between people arise because of differences in thinking, Appiah said, and free thinking is the basis for constitutional freedom.

If all people were raised thinking the same way, despite their cultural gaps, there would be no disputes between them, he said.

Appiah's own nuclear family combines at least three different cultures, and his extended family brings together many more.

"We all get along perfectly well because we want to," he said.

Integrating cultures, therefore, will not settle friction between people because those differences are not the cause, Appiah said.

Trying to create a common culture in the United States, he said, would be a mass assault on freedom.

Senate Majority Leader Bob Dole's proposal to establish English as the official language of the United States was an example of the government

stepping into an area of culture that society already has established, Appiah said.

"People are not any less American because they don't speak the language," he said.

Proposing laws against flag burning was another unconstitutional action by government to shape culture, Appiah said.

France has been an example of a country that promotes one national culture, he said.

The French government, through the education system, is aimed at preserving "Frenchness," Appiah said, by regulating employment of teachers, setting curriculum and approving French vocabulary.

The solution to overcoming differences is not in trying to correct other people's thinking, he said, but in listening and understanding it.

If people want to end racism and bigotry, they need to share experiences with people who think differently, Appiah said, even if they don't agree with them.

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